

2.4 A Tourism Strategy

2.4.1 Goal: A Welcoming Place for Visitors

Blacksburg is Southwest Virginia's authentic University Town a place of nostalgia for thousands of alumni and a "base camp" for visitors to the great natural resources of the region. Downtown Blacksburg is the hub of this visitor experience.

2.4.2 Background

Few communities in Southwest Virginia can compete with Blacksburg for its beauty, the activity in its downtown, and the youthful energy of the community. Few communities anywhere can claim tourism opportunities that beckon over a dozen times a year where hotel rooms are booked solid and people are there to experience a great time.

Blacksburg should be a prime tourism destination for the region, a 'jumping off' point for the outdoor recreation opportunities of the Blue Ridge Mountains and a place to relive the nostalgia of college days. These opportunities exist with a little marketing savvy.

2.4.3 Assets/Opportunities

- Blacksburg has "built-in" tourism weekends throughout the year. Attendance at these varies but each offers opportunities for downtown merchants to thrive on the visitor market. Few communities have such weekends.
- The community is truly unique in the region as an authentic University Town nestled in the mountains of Virginia. It should capitalize on this position.
- Virginia Tech is emerging as a "national name" and has immediate recognition. This could be channeled into opportunities for downtown.
- Western Virginia is one of the top tourism destinations in the southeast. Capturing some of this market could be a strong opportunity for Blacksburg.

2.4.4 Liabilities/Challenges

- Downtown Blacksburg and the community as a whole are not marketed as a tourism destination along the Interstate 81 corridor.



Figure 7: Plan showing gateway improvement locations



Figure 8: Examples of wayfinding signs.

- Downtown does not capitalize on visitor weekends such as graduation and reunions by hosting special events or marketing downtown to visitors during those times.
- Visitor signing, visitors' guides, and the Visitors' Center are not highly visible to those who aren't already familiar with the community.

2.4.5 Objectives

- A. Capitalize on the visitor weekends -- football, graduations, move-in days, reunions, parents' weekend.
- B. Capture visitors to the region as Virginia's largest University Town.
- C. Joint tour opportunities/welcome center with the University on Alumni Mall.
- D. Link to adjacent tourism resources such as the Blue Ridge Parkway, hiking, biking, outdoor adventures.

2.4.6 Action Strategies

Demonstration Projects – 2001-2002

- *Construct Gateway Improvements.* Figure 7 shows the concept for gateway improvements in downtown Blacksburg. These would be located at three sites in downtown. The first is the intersection of Clay and Main Street, the Second is the intersection of Main and Prices Fork Road and the third (already under construction) is the intersection of Turner Street and Prices Fork Road.
- *Wayfinding System.* Wayfinding for drivers and pedestrians is sorely lacking in Blacksburg. From the interstate to downtown, a unified wayfinding system is needed to direct visitors to their destination. Figure 8 shows some examples of wayfinding systems. They should incorporate a unifying logo and be consistent from large vehicular signs to smaller pedestrian signs.
- *Marketing and Events for Virginia Tech Alumni.* One of the easiest techniques for early implementation will be the development of a marketing strategy for Virginia Tech Alumni. This can be a joint ad placed in alumni association newsletters to special events for reunion weekends. The Merchants Association can coordinate this effort with the Alumni office at Virginia Tech to make visitor experiences for Virginia Tech graduates more memorable. Exhibit 16 shows some sample ads that could be used to market downtown to alumni.

Exhibit 14: Examples of ads to
Virginia Tech Alumni

[Click here to see Exhibit 14](#)

Next Steps – 2002 and Beyond

- *Develop new lodging facilities.* With Donaldson Brown Hotel and Conference Center leaving downtown Blacksburg, no other major downtown accommodations will be available. Visitors to communities like Blacksburg want to stay where they can walk to entertainment and events. A downtown Inn or small hotel will be an ideal use for the community. Exhibit 15 illustrates two potential locations for lodging facilities in downtown. The first is at the Alumni Mall Roundabout and the second is in front of the Blacksburg Middle School on the site of the existing Travelmasters agency.
- *Welcome Center.* A joint University/Chamber of Commerce Welcome Center is recommended for a site on the Alumni Mall roundabout. This center would be a prominent location to orient visitors to the community and the university. Exhibit fifteen illustrates this location.
- *Exhibition Facility.* A need for a community exhibition facility was identified several times during the strategic assessment process. Such a facility may occur in conjunction with a future educational use of the Middle School or along with future arts facilities built on the campus of Virginia Tech.

Exhibit 15: Plan showing
potential visitor amenities in
downtown Blacksburg

[Click here to see Exhibit 15](#)